

## **Homily – Follow Me**

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Who is your hero? Whether you have one hero or more than one hero, then what is it that your heroes mean to you? And, why are these people your heroes?

The definition of a hero has changed over the centuries. It used to be that a hero was someone who achieved conquest or lived by what was often a personal honor code. However, in the twenty-first century we think of a hero as a person who is admired for great acts or fine qualities.

Sometimes we have a deep sense of appreciation for something the hero has done or been, and sometimes they are a role model for us. The hero shows us how we should live our own lives.

My daughter, Katie, has become a hero for me. She has answered the call of motherhood with gusto. These last five years, she has upended her life to be available 24/7 for her son, Carter and now her daughter Kalina. Katie works full time, and she bravely hand over her son and daughter to a daycare center. Katie is a first-hand example to me of selflessness, a virtue that billions of other mothers and fathers have also shared. Heroes may be every day, but they model important virtues for us.

Another hero from my childhood is the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball player, Roberto Clemente. I grew up in Pittsburgh, and in 1971 when I was six-years old, I went to two of the World Series games. Roberto Clemente was the Most Valuable Player for that series. And, about a year later, he died in an airplane crash while answering the call to deliver aid to earthquake victims in Nicaragua. Each year Major League Baseball now gives out the Roberto Clemente Award for the player who "best exemplifies the game of baseball, sportsmanship, community involvement and the individual contribution to his team." Sometimes a hero is a hero for something other than what is seen as their major skill.

Now, you may have noticed that in describing these two heroes, I said that both of them had "answered a call." "Answering a call" is a part of the classic heroes journey that is part of mythology and part of real life.

Joseph Campbell was a professor of literature who worked in comparative religion. And, in his 1949 work "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", Campbell described the basic narrative pattern of the heroes journey as follows:

*"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."*

Campbell breaks down the heroes journey into the following classic stages. First, the departure includes a call to adventure, a refusal of the call, a mentor, and the crossing of the first threshold into the adventure.

Second, the initiation includes challenges and temptations, a helper, and a falling into the abyss with its subsequent revelation and transformation.

Finally, there is the return home with the gifts of atonement and healing. With the return the hero is able to live both in the world of the journey and the world of home. They can act as a bridge between these two worlds.

Many of you will recognize this journey from the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, but you will also see it in books and films. In the film the Matrix, Neo is called out into the world by Morpheus so that Neo can save the world.

In the Lord of the Rings, the hobbit, Frodo, is called out by Gandalf to destroy the ring and defeat evil.

Perhaps you recognize some of the heroes journey in your own life or in the life of a loved one. And, some of you with the personality type that seeks out adventure will be chomping at the bit to begin the call to a journey. And, others will be very reluctant to leave home.

In today's Gospel reading we have a call to the heroes journey.

*"...when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him."*

Jesus makes a call to Simon Peter and then to the brothers James and John. Curiously, Jesus did not say follow me to everyone. He did not say follow me to Zebedee, the father of James and John. I'm not sure what to make of that. For, I believe that Jesus calls all of us to follow him. Perhaps he called Zebedee into a different thing or at a different time. Be that as it may, over his lifetime, Jesus had many different men and

women to whom he said “follow me.” And, today’s Gospel reading shows us three of those people.

Now, unlike the classic heroes call, the three singled out by Jesus immediately answer the call and follow him. There are no questions asked or excuses given. The three leave their professions and more radically, leave their families. How many of us are willing to answer a call like that?

In my life as a priest, I call or invite people to do things every day. Sometimes I call myself the chief recruiter. For the most part, St. Barnabas is a volunteer organization. And, a wise mentor once taught me that the only way to invite a person into ministry is to always allow the answer to be “no.” At one time or another, many of you have said “no”. And, I want to re-enforce that “yes” is great and “no” is also OK. However, I wonder if Jesus made the call to “follow me” to some who declined.

But, today we see three who were called out of their everyday lives. We see three disciples who dropped what they thought was important so that they could join something larger than themselves.

I have seen many of you do this as we walk with each other in this community that we call St. Barnabas.

God calls all of us, so what are you going to do about it?  
Are you already in the midst of a call from God?  
Are you being called someplace new?  
Are you resisting a call?

I pray that we each hear the call of God to follow Jesus in ways that bring joy. My prayer is that we allow the heroes journey to occur in our own lives, and we aid that journey in the lives of others.

Now, I have noticed that many are afraid to follow Jesus because it might mean pain or suffering. Some are afraid to step out away from the safety of home because there is ambiguity. It can be hard to be in control of life and step away from home into an unknown journey. It can be hard to let go of control.

However, all of us face such moments in our lives, or many such moments, in which the center of gravity shifts from a story of self to one that will mean something in larger context. The heroes journey is often about letting go of the false self and ego and seeing the opportunities we have to get outside of self and serve the larger story. And, we are to serve the story in a way that is uniquely us.

Appreciative Inquiry is a method of ministry in which you identify strengths and build upon them. This is the method we used in our Vestry retreat yesterday as we remember 2024 and daydreamed about where God may be calling us in 2025. Sometimes in churches we try to jam round pegs into square holes. We try to fix a problem by changing the shape of the resource. Or, we focus on the problem and not on what is working well.

Instead, appreciative inquiry, again, identifies strengths and builds upon them. In this way a person is serving a call from God with gifts that are already built into them by God. The appreciative inquiry method of ministry minimizes alarm and brings comfort when answering a call.

Maybe you already have the gift of teaching, and God is calling to you share that gift in a new way. Maybe you already have the gift of hospitality and God is calling you to share that. Or, you are good with numbers, or food, or plants, or you name it.

What good gifts do you have? And, how might you share those talents in ways that allow you to follow Jesus? Do not be afraid of a call from Jesus for it will lead you to joy. Jesus is calling you to be your most authentic self in the service of God's kingdom.

And, with your most authentic self you will begin to see the world as Jesus sees it. When you follow Jesus you see the beauty in the world around you. You see beauty in all things and in all people.

We are never too old or too young to embrace the heroes journey and follow Jesus into the kingdom of God that is already around us. This is true as individuals and it is true as a community of God. Jesus is calling us to work together in this community we call St. Barnabas

We are a parish that is not struggling. We have been blessed with resources and energy that should be turned toward the kingdom of God that is already here surrounding us. We should be leaping at new and wonderful opportunities to be the hands, and feet, and voice of Jesus here in the South County. We should be equipping ourselves to follow Jesus and help others do the same. We should be making room for those who are not yet with us. We should be looking at all the things going on in these times and days and answering God's call.

My prayer is that we let go of any reservations, we answer the call to the journey, and we follow Jesus into the work that is being set before us.

May Jesus be our hero and our guide on this journey.